

# AVANT-GARDENING

In a recent issue of *Earth First!*, a preposterously possessive writer proposed that gardeners and homesteaders not sell their surplus produce to city folks. (Let them eat Twinkies!) He pleads for the abundance to be composted rather than to nourish an undeserving consumer mob. Economic deprivations and nutritional deficiencies notwithstanding, the writer blunders logically. City folks should be encouraged to stay exactly where they are — in the city. Like bait affixed to the tip of a hook, fresh local produce in plentiful supply from nearby farms indeed lures city dwellers into believing that they can have their cancer and eat their cake too. Deprived of fresh produce, many might flee the city and seek residence among the gardeners and homesteaders. One sprawling suburb.

City folks deserve appreciation, not condemnation. If they all did not live *there*, instead they would spread everywhere, including *here*. Where, then, would our friend the radical composter live? Levittown, Montana.

Some of my best friends are city folks. Most animal activists, for instance, live in cities. That's not surprising, since most people live in cities. What is surprising is that activists seldom experience personal contact with the animals whose lives they work so hard to defend. This removal exists because most farm and wild animals live where few or no people live, on farms (which unfortunately get bigger) and in wilderness (which unfortunately gets smaller).

Much of this country's original prairies and forests have been plundered and plowed into fields for farming and grazing. Remaining woodlands grow as islands in farmlands. Hunted or starved close to extinction by human animals, the larger non-human animals are now absent from the previously teeming forests. A tame and Disneyland atmosphere currently prevails in even national wildlife refuges, many of which have just recently been opened to hunters. As microcosm to macrocosm, typical American suburban homes are adorned by grassy lawns, some which host little islands of gardens. Wild animals are banished even from these gardens, which are far from approximating that of Eden. If just one squirrel samples a tomato or a single rabbit nibbles on lettuce, suburbanites alert the National Guard.

The time is ripe for the old regime to be overthrown by the new. The Avant-Gardener.

Being a vegetarian is fine and good. While friends grill hot dogs on fires and brimstones of summer barbecues you can be very happy (and very healthy) roasting corn-on-the-cob (and having a heart rather than a heart attack). But abstaining from meat and dairy products does not necessarily exonerate one from animal pain and death.



The produce seller shouts the price of corn but never whispers stories of the raccoon hunt the month before. In one night by a full moon, three hunters and their thirty dogs stalked forty raccoons up six trees, and within a month the raccoons became hats and coats. All because raccoons eat corn too.

As yet, few people have addressed the issue of animal slaughter on vegetable farms. And, until we do, we may have little idea of the total carnage. Here I report only my query of nearby gardeners on how they resolved their territorial disputes with the other local inhabitants. The wildlife.

"It was them or us," proclaimed Gardener A, "them" being a family of eight woodchucks. He recounted the story with tears in his eyes. Two days and eight shotgun shells later, it was no longer them.

"A barbed wire fence six feet high to keep out the coons," explained Gardener B, "And two feet deep to keep out the chucks." A small garden maybe, with no creeping vines. And maybe after ten autumn harvests the fence will pay for itself.

"No fence alone keeps out raccoons," advised Gardener C, who electrified his. "I hear them let out yelps in the middle of the night." Now we're talking Dachau.

"I gave up," admitted Gardener D. "It's much easier to buy my vegetables from the produce store than to wage war against them critters. Now I grow just flowers." Flower power. Let the farmers do the dirty work.

"One plot of corn for the raccoons. One plot of soybeans for the woodchucks," Gardener E counted out. "And one plot of everything else for me." Solution and redemption. Sometimes I ask questions of people not because I hope to hear what they want to answer, but because I want them to answer what I hope to hear.

An old story recounts a dispute between two

neighbors over a parcel of land that separated their two properties. Each claimed the parcel as his own. The case was brought to the community's old wise man. He carefully listened to each side. Then he bent down and laid his ear upon the ground. He stood up. "The land says it belongs to neither one of you," he said, as he bent down again. He listened to the land a while longer. He stood up again, then deliberated in silence. Finally he spoke. "The land says you both belong to the land."

Hence a new definition for the word "landlord." The Land is the Lord. Call it ancient Paganism, or contemporary ecology, or common sense — as evident as the land you are standing on.

The land was there first. The coons and chucks were there second. I was there long after the coons and chucks. The coons and chucks belong to the land more than do I. And the land belongs to the coons and chucks more than to me. So I share my crops with the land. Composting. And with the land's other tenants. Sharecropping.

Starting with the insects. We need only look upon the insects as friends rather than as enemies, and they will appear as beautiful as any bird. We would be thankful for their presence among us. And under and above us. And sometime, unavoidably, inside us too. Which would you choose to eat with your lettuce and tomato sandwich? Insects or insecticides?

In the absence of insecticides will survive those few species of garden insects that will eat your crops. But so also will survive the other ninety percent that don't, half of which eat other insects. The many species of plant- and insect-eating insects will attract insect-eating reptiles and insect- and reptile-eating birds. The birds will attract bird-eating birds and bird-eating mammals, and all the other birds and mammals too.

So why settle for just a garden of eating when you can have a Garden of Eden?

- Mark Braunstein (a refugee from Manhattan who lives in a wildlife refuge where he shares his garden with many visitors.)

In Lomakatsi #4:  
 •Spiritual  
 Materialism and  
 Vegetarian  
 Renunciation  
 •Avant-Gardening  
 •South Africa  
 (two million  
 years ago)  
 •Speciesism  
 •Pet Food  
 •Remnants of a  
 Conversation  
 (with Rachel  
 Rosenthal)  
 •Shhhhhh...  
 •poems, comics,  
 and more



**LOMAKATS**

## UH-OH

Birds decide to give up their wings  
 because flying indulges in an ego trip.  
 Hermit crabs decide they have to pay rent  
 on their shells.  
 Snakes invent banks where they can invest  
 their sloughed off skins.  
 Beavers vote to build highrise lodges  
 above their ponds.  
 Squirrels expect a minimum wage  
 for storing nuts in secret.  
 Earthworm expressways install periodic tollbooths  
 to help defray construction costs.  
 Lions build cages, lock themselves in  
 and charge admission to see them.  
 Butterflies get rich from fee to see  
 emergence from chrysalis.  
 Termite Thoreau goes to live by a dew drop for awhile  
 before returning to the termite mound.  
 The turnip and parsnip form a partnership.  
 Celery wants a salary.  
 Cows demand humans make their own milk  
 from their own tits  
 and eat their own sawn muscles.  
 Trees agree to sprout money instead of leaves  
 as long as they can make newspapers  
 out of human corpses  
 to print tree-news.  
 Dust motes go on strike  
 for safer floating conditions.  
 One raindrop says to another raindrop —  
 "I don't believe in clouds  
 or that we're falling."  
 Plankton plot how to conquer the ocean.  
 Seahorses form cavalries and charge  
 to periwinkle bugle calls.  
 Mayflies scheme to be more famous as poets  
 than other mayflies.  
 Mountains want to get away from it all too,  
 tired of carrying the world on their shoulders.  
 Roses make x-rated videos of rosebuds opening.  
 Sloths realize they better change their lazy ways  
 or else.  
 Spiders decide not to spin webs  
 unless they're displayed in art museums.  
 Crickets refuse to cricket  
 unless haikus take notice.  
 Whales grow back their arms and legs  
 so they can return to land and work  
 in our factories.  
 Flowers want to work in factories too.  
 They feel funny just sitting around  
 doing nothing but being beautiful  
 and smelling good.  
 Penguins decide to take off their tuxedos  
 and wear their bum-clothes for a change.

- Antler